Klein, Bernhard
(Maler-Mappe)

DRAWER 2/11

SCULPTORS — K

NL 0403 .D85 no.949

Statues of Abraham Lincoln

Blaine Kern

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the

Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

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PHOTOGRAPH BY RICHARD ROSS

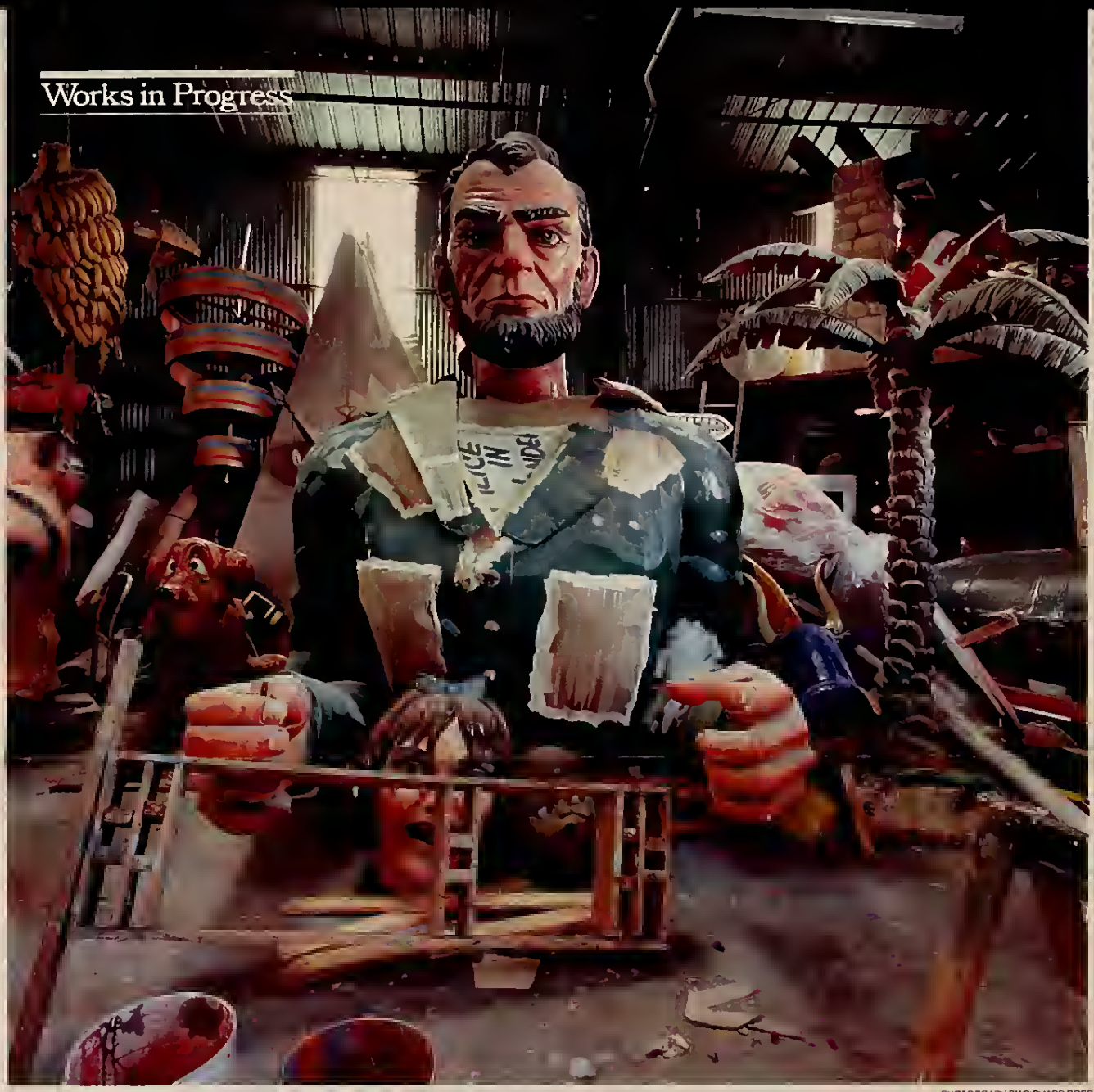
Larger Than Life

THEY CALL ME MR. MARDI Gras," Blaine Kern says, with some justification. The float-and-prop design firm he founded 41 years ago, Blaine Kern Artists, is now responsible for much of the mobile decoration that parades through New Orleans during the notorious, pre-Lent carnival every year. (This year's celebration runs from mid-January through Feb. 7, which is the day known as Mardi Gras.) Stored in 28 huge warehouses Kern refers to as "dens," the population of papier-mâché figures he's created over the years by now amounts to a purgatory for replicas of the famous and fantastic. "I've got practically every President," Kern says. "Every god and goddess. And all sorts of creatures — witches, goblins, Prince Charmings."

Abe Lincoln (above), nearly 14 feet tall, was probably built five years ago, though Kern can't recall exactly. He's being refurbished for an appearance at the annual Endymion Extravaganza, a pre-Mardi Gras celebration on Feb. 4 that includes a parade through the streets of New Orleans and into the Superdome, where there'll be a party for 12,000. The theme this year is "They Changed the World," and riding the 40 floats, all of them made by Kern, will be a host of oversized heroes: Caesar, Gutenberg, Beethoven, Newton, Einstein and George Washington Carver, among others. "They're nude, generally speaking," Kern says of his menagerie, "and I can dress them in any attire, give a man pointy ears or paint his skin red and turn him into Mephistopheles." For the parade, all will be animated so their heads turn.

Blaine Kern Artists turn out between 350 and 400 floats a year. They do parade work in 20 other cities. But Kern admits his reputation was made and remains in New Orleans. "If you write a letter to Mardi Gras headquarters," he says, "it comes here."

— BRUCE WEBER



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Kenny Scharf
(Painter/Mixed)

DRAWER 2/2

SCULPTORS— K